

## **Samadhi**

Three years have passed since initiation. In 1985 he was still living with his family in Gwalior, in the rental house. The setting was quite secluded, there were just several other buildings situated behind the engineering college; green acres of festival grounds and local smashan nearby shielded the residences from the distant city noise and it was almost serene.

It was the last week of September and he was in the room; his nightly yoga sadhana felt familiar and almost routine when, after exhaling in Yoni Mudra, something just suddenly clicked inside and his mind opened, like a door. The kutastha - dark sphere, surrounded by the bright ring of light, was becoming brighter, bigger, finally swallowing him - and he fell into its dazzling glow.

His heart stopped, breathing ceased and the consciousness was entering every dwelling in the city, where humans, old and young, were going about their business. His mind was absorbing, or, rather observing, the minds of every being.

He was able to see, no, rather feel what they were doing: some were eating, some defecating, many were having sex. Some were plotting against their neighbors or employers, others were feeling rage or slow burning anger; sexual desires, thoughts of possessing someone or something were almost palpable.... A mix, a cocktail of a multitude of emotions and feelings were poured into his wide-spread mind – and he suddenly understood all these emotions. All at once. It was overwhelming. And the smell of humanity was unbearable.

Yogic texts described this highest state of development as bliss, but the surge of sensations was far from pleasant. Romantic descriptions of samadhi were not inclusive of the mad barrage of emotions that filled his mind. Later on, he learned how to go beyond this state, to block or avoid the multitude of rapid waves of human thoughts, the excessive exposure to a cacophony of emotions.

He became intensely aware of his own existence: no, he did not dissolve in the surge of all-knowing and all-seeing, nor forget his name for even a moment. The core of personality remained intact. He rather started to remember everything he had forgotten while taking different births. And these memories lasted. It was impossible to forget.

The body went to sleep, it was numb and lifeless; there was no blood circulation, no breath, but he understood it only later, gradually regaining awareness. Slowly and hesitantly at first, the heartbeat resumed.

As the blood circulation was slowly restored, the sensations were overwhelming, almost unbearable. Years later, answering the student's questions about this moment, he asked them to imagine a numb leg or arm, when blood flow slowly resumes in the limbs. And then to imagine the entire body in this state – numb and lifeless, with itching and pricking of millions of tiny needles piercing throughout organs, bones, and nerves. It was very hard to tolerate this overpowering tingling sensation and he was using all his will power not to scream ...

He glanced at the dial of his watch and understood that a state of suspended animation lasted for one hour and thirty minutes; he was so sure of the timing because he checked the watch before Yoni Mudra, before falling into its light....

He knew exactly what just happened and it was a great feeling, similar to the feeling of torturous exhaustion and hunger during a long journey when suddenly a traveler finds a safe and hospitable place to eat and rest... Such was a type of gratification which filled him. He quenched his thirst.

Waking up the next morning, he realized that he slept for more than 10 hours. Mother was worried, calling him to eat, and he had to drag himself out of bed, still remembering the abyss, which opened last night for him to explore...

But the outcome was rather troubling: back then he was unaware of higher pranayams, which allowed the body and mind to tolerate such transformations. He felt depressed and tired and was laying down most of the time, looking at the ceiling, recalling the experience; even the desire to practice yoga had vanished, along with his appetite. Inertia overcame him.

His mother kept forcing him to get up and eat, thinking that he was heartbroken, suffering from unrequited love.

He tried to share his experience with his mother and cousins, but they looked at him in a peculiar way, assuming that he was not right in the head and might be in need of mental treatment. So, he stopped talking. He realized that he could share this only with his Guru, as the parameters of such experiences were far beyond the comprehension of so-called ordinary people. There was nothing wrong with their kind, but from then on, he learned to recognize the invisible border that lay between a laymen and the spiritual seeker.

Some of the discoveries of the first samadhi were quite shocking. It was not a blissful state, as the uninitiated imagine it. In addition to the effects of the body changes, samadhi painfully destroyed old perceptions of the world. Releasing the mind from the conditioned state revealed the sad truth about most of the former authorities - they were just phantoms. Parents turned out to be quite ordinary people, and the indisputable truths they broadcasted were very primitive and relative. An emptiness remained in place of the overthrown idols, and it was very painful at first.

He learned from his own experience that the path of the spiritual quest was rather thorny if one was living with family.

Sooner or later, it would become unbearable and simply impossible to get along further – even or especially - with relatives. Over the years, he continued to observe and listen to the stories of others who strived to follow the path of spiritual development. A great many obstacles and traps awaited them. The seeker was moving in the stream of his imagination, inspired and hopeful - and those around him remained immobilized. They tried to stop the one who was on the Path, calling it a “waste of time”, to talk him out of this spiritual nonsense. The domestic dependence of one person on another was called "duty" or "responsibility" - to the family, society, country, and even humanity and required obedience to the rules.

They shamed the impractical dreamer for avoiding this ephemeral duty, accusing him of selfishness, recalling everything that they did for his good.

Someone else's advancement and development made people subconsciously feel their own inability to progress - and this was intolerable and irritating to them. A violator of known rules and regulations must be warned, shamed, scolded, corrected, stopped ...

In short, in the real world the state of affairs for those who experienced samadhi or were aspiring to this experience was rather sad.

After two to three months in this state, he understood that he was growing old rapidly. One day, coming from the shower, he saw gray in his hair, and even on his chest...

Then it suddenly became clear: samadhi was an experience of death - that's why the body displayed the signs of ageing, mistaking the absence of breath and heartbeat for death and obediently began a transformation towards decay.

He drove himself to train with weights, to perform more Mahamudras. Initially, it was very hard just to get up, to persuade his body to perform. The mind was not convinced of the necessity of any activity, considering it useless to the body, which was intended to fade, to waste away after it had passed through the gates of death.

The body needed a clue, a direction back to the taste of life, to the pulse and pain in its muscles, and he forced it to feel its own existence anew.

Eventually hard exercises helped to stop the active process of ageing, even some of the grey hair turned black again. He understood that Samadhi was not the final aim of yoga but just the beginning of another chapter, the starting point of a much longer journey.

### **A trick or an achievement; the lost meaning of Samadhi**

His **Teacher** had his first experience of the yogic state of suspended animation when he was well over fifty; his father, Tinkori Lahiri, had already passed away. He never went into details when disciples tried to ask him about it, always replying: "You will know all about it when you experience it for yourself".

Of course, the **teacher** was right. He often resorted to the well-known allegory about a virgin, who, after witnessing several childbirths, would still be unable to understand the full meaning of it without realizing the events preceding this act, as well as the subsequent states of the mother, her feelings and emotions ...

However, it was known that since first samadhi Guru saw his Jiva whenever he was closing his eyes. It appeared as a glowing golden human figure, the size of a thumb, radiating unbearable beauty...

One day Guru told him a story that had happened in Benares in the late 1930-s, maybe in 1936, just after his father's death. A sadhu came to town and received permission from the British collector to conduct an experiment: a situation of underground confinement, without food and water, which was also officially guarded - to make sure that the "experiment" was genuine.

He prepared himself by fully shaving his head and body (to prevent insects from nesting in it), cleaned his intestines and stomach thoroughly with every possible prakshalana, so that no trace



of any organic particle would remain inside. Then he drank some ghee as a lubricant for the digestive tract and climbed into an underground pit, boarded up and guarded by a government-appointed soldier. Then he went into a state of suspended animation for six months.

Half a year passed and the improvised cave was opened, his body was dug up and his assistant (or maybe his disciple), helped him to adjust. The sadhu came out of samadhi alive and this fact was officially registered by the British authorities.

His body was yellowish in colour, because of the long absence of sunlight. Not a single hair grew on his body, he looked as if he was freshly shaven. Unable to tolerate sunlight, he waited 7-8 days to be able to withstand it again. Adjustment happened slowly, gradually: for a couple of days he remained in total darkness, then some light was allowed into his room through a tiny crack in the door, then through the windows; finally, he stepped outside...

When he was dug out, his assistant gently massaged his neck and shoulders, pressing some points and whispering some mantra in his left ear. Un-clenching his teeth, he poured a little bit of ghee in his mouth, to restart his digestive tract, and to cleanse it after six months of fasting.

It took about one week to revive him fully so that he could walk without help. He regained his speech. And became quite famous, collecting lots of money in donations.

 Shyamacharan Lahiri went to see him. The sadhu knew of his famous grandfather, Lahiri Mahasaya - and because of it, acquainted him for lunch. Shri  Shyamacharan Lahiri asked him about his skills, and the techniques which allowed him to survive in a breathless state for 6 months, and also about the thoughts and emotions he experienced in the state of suspended animation.

The sadhu answered honestly : “I felt nothing; as if I was in a coma”.

All body function ceased, even the growth of hair and nails stopped. And, unlike the yogic samadhi, his mind went blank and dark. There were no thoughts, no emotions- just the absolute darkness of non-existence.

He told his story: in his 30's he was struck by a personal tragedy. Grieving and depressed, he came to Chitrakoot hill, called Hanuman Dhara - to end his life. There was a Hanuman temple on the top of the hill: one had to climb hundreds of steps to reach it. His emotional trauma was burning his mind - and, unable to regain peace, he sat quietly on the edge of a cliff, preparing to jump. Suddenly somebody called him.

It was unclear where this man appeared from, but this call changed everything.

He was a Sadhu, who told him: “if you really want to die, don’t leave in such an undignified and primitive way; come with me and I will teach you to die properly...”

And so he became a disciple of that sadhu, who taught him the art of “dying” by halting all bodily functions, breath and circulation of blood through the veins and Internal organs. He was also taught to press certain points on his neck and at the base of the nape to “cut off the head”, to stop supply of the oxygen-charged blood flow to the brain.

The man became a Sadhu himself, although he was not a yogi in a strict sense since he did not practice any other techniques or discipline aside from the “art of dying”. Although some people considered this skill quite yogic and there was no contradiction for the general public, who were interested only in miracles, not in the motives or goals of such austerity. They came to see a man emerging from death and paid money as a tribute to his courage.

From time to time he would come to Benares to speak of his experience and made thousands of rupees. His devotees showered him with money, and he became known as a great siddha.

Indeed, he was a great achiever. How many people in Benares - or the entire India- would be able to demonstrate something similar to the art of dying and coming back to life? Although it was not the result of yogic tapas, it surely required great courage.

He told **Shyamacharan** Lahiri: “Your way of achieving samadhi is different. Yours is a real yogic samadhi because you are able to experience so many things when the mind is expanded. When I sat underground and entered this state it felt only as a deep sleep; I was unconscious, in a coma. I saw nothing, remembered nothing and had no dreams or visions”. That was his statement. He was not an educated man – but he learned to achieve the impossible. However, he was unable to do khechari mudra, a crucial part of a higher yogic Sadhana. He had heard of it, but wasn’t taught it; his skills were all about the temporary suspension of all signs of life, including brain functions.

He never shared it with **Shyamacharan** Lahiri, but it became known almost 80 years later that the death-like state was achieved with the help of one special herbal ingredient. There was a plant, which grew only in the jungles on the banks of Namdari river. With tiny leafs, seemingly insignificant, it could induce a state of suspended animation, when prepared properly. And this was a key ingredient of the miracle. Also, perhaps, some mantras (which he never mentioned to **Shyamacharan** Lahiri), together with acupressure. But the main techniques were aimed at the revival of the body, bringing it back to life... That is why an assistant was needed...

While visiting Chitrakoot in the 1990’s he inquired with some old sadhus if they remembered anything about this man. They said yes, we have heard about him, he disappeared years ago,

maybe he died of old age. Or maybe he used his unique skill to go on one last journey using the same method? If he was in a self-induced suspended animation, then how long could the effect of this herbal remedy support his body...? Nobody knew for sure.

The Sadhu was well built and physically fit, which definitely helped him to withstand the tremendous stress on the nervous system and heart during these “experiments”...

...And there was another story, documented by the british government of Benares as told by his Guru.

A yogi went into the state of samadhi and remained underground, in a specially prepared hollow for several months, before emerging alive. The pit where he sat was covered with a stone slab, and evenly levelled soil. Then the field was sown with wheat; after a few months, when the crop was harvested, the yogi was dug up.

British authorities registered such cases methodically, but some were known only through the tales of eyewitnesses.

....One case was described by some people who came to his Guru in 1985, when he was visiting his Teacher. Some excavation work was done near the ghats of Ganges and the workers found the body of a yogi who was sitting in padmasana. His flesh was seemingly intact, almost all of his muscular mass was well preserved. He was covered with dust and earth because the workers had broken the walls of the underground structure that was sheltering him. At first the workers were in awe and scared to touch him - until one of the labourers did the stupidest thing.

He tried to open the yogi's mouth with a crowbar and some blood came out of the corner of his closed lips. Asket's eyelids slowly opened, he took a slow deep breath and with a low voice, sounding almost as a whisper, slowly moving dry cracked lips, asked, “What year is it? Who is ruling now?”

One of the workers, who did not lose the ability to speak, answered, “it is a democracy, we are ruled by the government, no kings are left now...”

Slowly, with effort, yogi unfolded his legs. “Oh, so it came to that...”

They pulled him to the surface and he made several unsteady steps toward the river. He was naked, except for a piece of cloth tied around his hips, a langoti, and his skin was the colour of ash. Suddenly, he jumped into the river, dived, and was not seen again.

The stories were just stories, especially in Benares, the city of million of stories, re-told and forgotten, but the storyteller who came to the house of his Guru was in charge of this

construction site and knew his labourers well - they were simple people, incapable of inventing such a tale collectively and sticking to the details...

...and then there was a woman saint, who lived near Gwalior, her ashram was close to the place where his farm cottage used to be. She was quite famous in this area.

Her name was Ram Sihasankar and she was in her 50's when they met for the first time. He was already living in Govardhan when one of his acquaintances, Surya Prakash Sharma, showed her a photograph of a yogi, sitting on the back of a white bull. She insisted on seeing him and has visited twice. Although a well known saint, she usually greeted him with Pranam, touching his feet as respectfully as a daughter touches the feet of the father....

She went in samadhi for one year - or so her devotees claimed.

When he asked her about this experience, she said: "The spirit of my Guru, Shankh Baba, always remained with me."

She entered the small underground chamber near the Hanuman temple in the village of Throt and remained underground continuously without food, water or sunlight.

The villagers were singing kirtan 24 hours a day, for one year - and it was as good as guarding solitude, guaranteeing her safety and making sure that she remained un-disturbed ....

Before stepping into the underground chamber she said: "when I come out in a year I will be naked; expect a great storm and rain on that day". And it occurred as she described: in one year she emerged from underground, stark naked, her hair long and matted, in front of thousands of people who came to witness this miracle; a big thunderstorm came within minutes of her appearance.

She never practiced khechhari or any other yogic techniques; but the spirit of her Guru always remained with her, as she stated - and, perhaps, it was what sustained her during her sadhana.

She was very innocent, child-like; aware of the future, of some coming events. Because of her abilities, many local politicians would come to her, asking for blessings before elections...

While she was not exactly in the state of permanent bliss, her actions, words and demeanour were saintly.

Once she visited him and asked for his blessings for Parikrama. She was wearing thick woollen socks and he noted they would be torn and shredded after the 21 kilometre walk. She answered: "oh, I will walk lightly, trying not to touch the ground, they won't be torn" - and so she did.

There is still a tradition in India: when a young daughter-in-law is eating, she will cover her face, to not be seen chewing in front of her father-in-law, and Ram Sihasankar's overall attitude towards him was similar...

At the end of the twentieth century the meaning of the term "samadhi" had changed. It is used out of respect for a departed politician, public figure, or revered person. "He went into samadhi, here is the place of his samadhi" - and this has nothing to do with yoga or the state of suspended animation.

The highest goal of the yogic practice is incomprehensible to commoners, who live to please their senses, not to part with them.